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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 001688

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SUBJECT: Biographic sketches of up-and-coming Sri Lankan politicians

Refs: Colombo 1684, and previous

(U) Classified by James F. Entwistle, Deputy Chief of Mission. Reasons 1.5 (b,d).

1. (C) Para two contains brief biographic sketches of ten up-and-coming Sri Lankan politicians. Four of the sketches are of governing United National Party (UNP) politicians, three are of opposition People's Alliance (PA) politicians, and one each from the radical Jananatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), and the Muslim National Unity Alliance (NUA). One of the biographic sketches is of a woman politician: Chandrani Jayasinghe of the UNP.

2. (C) Brief biographic sketches follow:

UNP POLITICIANS

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>>> NAVIN DISSANAYAKE: Dissanayake, 34, is a UNP MP from Nuwara Eliya in Sri Lanka's central highlands. He was first elected to Parliament in 2000 and was re-elected in 2001. He currently serves as Deputy Minister of Plantation Industries. He hails from a very well-known family; his father, Gamani, was a major UNP leader who was assassinated in 1994 by the Tamil Tigers. He also benefits from his close relationship with Deputy UNP Leader Karu Jayasuriya, the Minister of Power and Energy, who is his father-in-law. Dissanayake is clearly on his way up in UNP leadership ranks, but he has a bit of a controversial reputation. He has a poor relationship with A. Thondaman, the head of the tea estate Tamil Ceylon Worker's Congress (CWC), the most influential party in Nuwara Eliya. More importantly, he is believed to be currently on the outs with Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, who is said to consider Dissanayake a bit of a loose cannon. Friendly toward the U.S., he recently attended a USG-sponsored conference in Hawaii. He was educated at Colombo's prestigious Royal College and graduated from the University of Sussex in the UK. He is a lawyer by profession, attending the Middle Temple in London. He speaks excellent English and is Sinhalese Buddhist.

>>> SAJITH PREMADASA: Premadasa, 36, is a UNP MP from Hambantota District in Sri Lanka's deep south. He was first elected to Parliament in 2000 and was re-elected in 2001. He serves the governing coalition as Deputy Minister of Health and Nutrition. His father, then-President R. Premadasa, was assassinated by the LTTE in 1993. Due to his father's manifold connections, Premadasa has many links in UNP circles, which should help him as he tries to ascend into UNP leadership ranks. Premadasa is highly respected as a well-informed, active MP. He was educated at Royal College, and also studied in the UK and the U.S. He is an IVP nominee in 2003. His wife, Hema, is a well-known Colombo socialite. He speaks excellent English and is Sinhalese Buddhist.

>>> CHANDRANI JAYASINGHE: Jayasinghe, 39, is a UNP MP from Anuradhapura District in north-central Sri Lanka. She was first elected to Parliament in 2000 and again in 2001. She comes from a political family; her father, the late Chandra Bandara, was the Minister of Power and Energy in President J.R. Jayawardene's government. Educated in Sri Lanka, she is a graduate of the prestigious St. Bridget's College in Colombo and the Sri Lanka Law College. She is considered a possible candidate to become a minister or a deputy minister in any re-shuffling of portfolios. She is a practicing attorney in Anuradhapura, as is her husband. She speaks good English and is Sinhalese Buddhist.

>>> SAGALA RATNAYAKE: Ratnayake, 35, is a UNP MP from Matara District in Sri Lanka's deep south. He was first elected to Parliament in 2000 and again in 2001. His father, the late Kolitha Ratnayake, was the owner of a large tea estate and chairman of the State Plantation Corporation, which oversees all state-owned tea estates.

At present, Ratnayake is Deputy Minister of Power and Energy, working under Minister Karu Jayasuriya. He is a close ally of Prime Minister Wickremesinghe. An excellent vote-getter, Ratnayake has a relaxed, easygoing manner. He is a graduate of Colombo's Royal College. He later attended Lewis and Clark College in Portland, Oregon, and has a bachelor's degree from the University of Munich in business administration. He speaks good English and is a Sinhalese Buddhist.

PA POLITICIANS =====

>>> ARJUNA RANATUNGA: Ranatunga, 40, is a PA MP from Colombo District. He was first elected to Parliament in 2001. His father, Reggie Ranatunga, is a fellow PA MP, representing Gampaha District near Colombo. Ranatunga entered politics after a highly successful cricket career with Sri Lanka's national team. He was the team captain from 1989 to 1999, including during its Cricket World Cup win in 1996, and many Sri Lankans consider him a hero for his role in that victory. Ranatunga is believed to be very close to President Kumaratunga, who reportedly convinced him to run for Parliament as a PA candidate. He ran for president of the influential Board of Control for Cricket in Sri Lanka in June 2003, but was defeated. In addition to his political activities, he is involved in a private insurance business. He is a graduate of Colombo's Ananda College, a well-known Buddhist high school. He speaks excellent English and is Sinhalese Buddhist.

>>> VADIVAL PUTHTHIRASIGAMONEY: Puththirasigamoney, 52, is a PA MP from Nuwara Eliya district in Sri Lanka's central highlands. He was first elected to Parliament in 2000 as a UNP member, switched parties, and was selected as a PA MP on the party's National list in 2001. He has long been a political and social activist on behalf of the tea estate Tamil community. In an affiliation with the CWC early in his career, he was a high-level committee member for the party and a representative of its estate trade union. Due to his party switching ways, Puththirasigamoney now maintains a frosty relationship with both the CWC and the UNP. He was an IVP participant in 1988. Most recently, he was the Deputy Mayor of Nuwara Eliya prior to his election to Parliament. He speaks excellent English and is a Tamil Hindu.

>>> DILAN PERERA: Perera, 41, is a PA MP from the Badulla District in Sri Lanka's central highlands. He was first elected to Parliament in 1994 and has been a member since that time. In the previous PA government, Perera served as Deputy Minister of Justice. Prior to his election to Parliament, he was a member of the Uva Provincial Council. He is a graduate of Royal College and the Sri Lanka Law College. He is considered a close associate of Dr. Sarath Amunugama, the chief PA spokesman and a senior MP. Perera maintains a law practice in Badulla, speaks good English, and is Sinhalese Buddhist.

JVP ===

>>> VIJITHA HERATH: Herath, 40, is a JVP MP from Gampaha District. He is one of the relatively few public faces of the JVP (the party strictly controls its public interactions). He is considered intelligent and articulate, and is said to be very close to JVP General Secretary Tilvin Silva. Herath has made many strident

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comments against the direction of the peace process. He also recently visited North Korea and was quoted in the press as expressing admiration for the system there. For these views and others, he is considered a firebrand of sorts even within JVP norms. Although a member of the JVP throughout the group's 1988-89 insurrection, Herath did not serve in the group's military wing and was not implicated in any armed attacks on the government. He speaks some English and is Sinhalese Buddhist.

TNA ===

>>> GAJENDRA KUMAR PONNAMBALAM: Ponnambalam, 29, is a TNA MP from the All-Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC) representing Jaffna District. His father, Kumar, was the head of the ACTC, but was assassinated in 2000. His grandfather, G.G., was the founder of the ACTC and one of the most important Tamil politicians in Sri Lanka from the time of independence in 1948 until the 1970s. Ponnambalam, who is bright and quite articulate, is a strong advocate for Tamil causes and is considered

relatively close to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). He is willing to criticize the LTTE in private, however. Ponnambalam is strongly pro-peace process and friendly to the UNP government. A lawyer by training, he speaks excellent English and is a Tamil Hindu.

NUA
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>>> M.L.A.M. HIZBULLAH: Hizbullah, 40, is a NUA MP from Batticaloa District in the east. He first entered Parliament in 1989. He is very close to Ferial Ashraff, the leader of the NUA, and is an opponent of Rauf Hakeem, the leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, the country's largest Muslim party. Hizbullah is considered pro-peace process, but is a strong critic of the LTTE, especially over the group's harassment of Muslims in the east. Hizbullah is an outstanding vote-getter, with a warm, friendly temperament. While mildly critical of U.S. policy in the Middle East, Hizbullah denounces terrorism and refrained from publicly criticizing Operation Iraqi Freedom. He was an IVP participant in 1999. He speaks excellent English and is a Muslim.

13. (U) Minimize considered.

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